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# **Pathways to inclusion – Strengthening European cooperation in Prison Education and Training**

**22-24 February 2010**

**Budapest**

## **KEY MESSAGES**

**DRAFT as of 14/04/10**

## Introduction

The conference, "*Pathways to Inclusion – Strengthening European Cooperation in Prison Education and Training*" was held in Budapest between 22 and 24 February 2010. The event was organised by the European Commission and co-hosted by the Hungarian Prison Service.

The conference was linked to the European Year for combating Poverty and Social Exclusion and was also part of the 10th anniversary celebrations of the Grundtvig programme. Its main aim was to disseminate the projects and partnerships funded by Grundtvig, the EU's programme for adult learning, as well as the Leonardo da Vinci programme for vocational training, both of which form part of the Lifelong Learning programme. Results from relevant projects funded by the EQUAL Community Initiative were also highlighted. In this way, it was hoped that delegates would be able to pool expertise and to promote the development of a sustainable European community of experience in this area.

The conference had the following objectives:

- to draw together some of the main outcomes of the initiatives supported by European funds;
- to foster the mainstreaming of good practices by drawing them to the attention of policy-makers;
- to promote networking and exchange of experiences between organisations and key individuals working in this field;
- to identify future needs for European cooperation in this area, in the light of overall policy trends.

Some 220 people attended the *Pathways to Inclusion* conference, representing over 30 European countries, including all EU Member States. All the 'stakeholders' with a major interest in prison education and training – both at the level of policy and practice - were involved. Participants included:

- representatives of EU-supported projects;
- senior national officials (Ministries of Justice, Education and Labour) responsible for prison education and training;
- directors-general of national prison services from several countries,
- prison governors;
- representatives of the Council of Europe and European / international NGOs;
- National Agencies for the Lifelong Learning programme;
- national managing authorities responsible for expenditure under the ESF;
- various Commission departments;
- key individual experts and researchers.

In addition to plenary sessions, keynote speeches and a round-table discussion, the conference was structured around three series of working groups, which brought delegates together to discuss the subjects listed in the table below:

| Working Group Series A                                                      | Working Group Series B                                                             | Working Group Series C  |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1) Adult Basic Education                                                    | 1) Juvenile offenders                                                              | 1) Grundtvig programme  |
| 2) Arts and Cultural Creativity                                             | 2) Foreign offenders and offenders from an ethnic minority or migration background | 2) Leonardo programme   |
| 3) Vocational Training                                                      | 3) Female offenders                                                                | 3) European Social Fund |
| 4) Guidance and Counselling, Validation of Prior Learning, Individual Plans | 4) Long-term offenders                                                             |                         |
| 5) E-learning, information technology, distance learning                    | 5) Short-term offenders                                                            |                         |
| 6) Initial and in-service teacher training                                  | 6) Offenders with special learning needs or mental health problems                 |                         |
| 7) The prison as a positive environment for learning                        |                                                                                    |                         |
| 8) Release, transition, reintegration: the role of education and training   |                                                                                    |                         |
| 9) Research needs in prison education and training                          |                                                                                    |                         |

In addition, a number of outputs from European-level projects were showcased at the conference, including artwork created by offenders and DVDs showing some of the project activities and results. Delegates were also given the opportunity to take part in a visit to one of three prisons in the host country.

Keynote speeches were delivered by Prof. Tom Schuller, director of the recent UK Inquiry into the Future for Lifelong Learning and author of the related study on *Crime and Lifelong Learning*, and Mr William Rentzmann, Director-General of the Danish Prison Service.

Full documentation on the conference, including the Final Report, the reports of the specialised working groups, the powerpoint presentations and participants list with contact details, is being made progressively available via the [conference website](#)<sup>1</sup>.

A very representative sample of almost half the conference participants participated in the online conference evaluation. Opinions on the conference and its impact on participants were extremely positive:

- 98 % said they gained a better understanding of some aspects of prison education and training in other European countries;
- 100 % gained a better understanding of the European policies and programmes in the field of prison education and training;
- 97 % found inspiration for future projects;
- 99 % found the event useful for making contacts and networking;
- 98% appreciated highly the set of 5 pre-conference documents (including two specially commissioned analyses, discussion documents for the working groups and project catalogues);
- 90% rated the organisational aspects of the conferences very positively.

<sup>1</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/education/grundtvig/doc2047\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/grundtvig/doc2047_en.htm)

## Key Messages from the conference

Plenary sessions and working group discussions made it clear that the **growth in prison populations in recent years, together with the subsequent increase in overcrowding, is having a significant impact on the provision of education and training opportunities in prisons.**

**Financial constraints** are also a key issue faced in most European countries. In the context of economic downturn, public sector budgets are under increasing pressure and jobs are even more difficult to find on release. Furthermore, the growing diversity of the prison population, with in particular increasing numbers of foreign prisoners, are presenting new challenges, as well as opportunities, for prison educators.

According to international conventions and recommendations, offenders have the same **right to education** as other citizens. Throughout the conference, it was clear that the delegates and speakers recognised **education and training as a vital element of the rehabilitation package for offenders.** The need to offer educational opportunities through a holistic approach, delivered through **multi-disciplinary, cross-agency collaboration**, is emphasised and now needs to become a reality everywhere in Europe. The importance of **follow-up support**, beyond the offender's time in prison, was also stressed, as well as the need to make greater links between prisons and the 'outside' community.

**Education and training in prison should be an integral part of education and training provision as a whole**, however its governance is organised. The need for prison education to keep pace with changes in policy and practice, as well as lessons learned from research in the field of education and training, was therefore emphasised. **ICT and distance learning** were seen as opening up new opportunities for education in prison, and progress was made at the conference towards the emergence of a common European platform or interface for e-learning in the prison context. Approaches to the **validation of non-formal and informal learning**, improvements in **guidance and counselling** and other tools and policy developments at EU level were also identified as having high potential for enhancing prison education and training. While tools and methods from the mainstream or those used for other target groups may need to be tailored, there is no need to 'reinvent the wheel'. The curriculum offer should be broad and not restricted to the 'traditional' subjects, should embrace **social and personal skills and attitudes as well as cognitive learning**, while new methods of 'experiential learning' should also be explored. **Vocational training should be relevant to the needs of the modern labour market.**

A need for **training for prison educators** themselves was identified, for instance in order to use new technologies and teaching methods and to understand the needs of specific target groups. The **role of prison governors and well-trained prison officers** in creating a **positive environment for learning** was stressed. In addition, awareness-raising of the benefits of prison education and training among key officials and among the public is required, to promote greater understanding of the benefits of prison education and training.

**Research in this area should be greatly expanded**, in terms of both the issues addressed and the overall volume of analytical work conducted. Research results have pointed to the **extremely positive cost-benefit ratio of prison education**, but more research on this issue on a wider geographical basis should be among the prominent aspects pursued. Whatever research is carried out, it needs to be robust and should adhere to high standards, both scientific and ethical. In addition, it is necessary to translate the findings of research into practical, applicable models and guidelines and to disseminate these in appropriate ways to

their appropriate target groups, notably those responsible for system management, policy and funding of the prison service. Thus, collaboration is required also in the delivery and dissemination of research. The importance of **building European networks** and forums to enable such collaboration and communication – and providing the necessary financial support to facilitate this – was highlighted. Judging by responses from participants to the post-conference evaluation, it is highly probable that the conference itself will have stimulated the emergence of collaborative initiatives involving researchers from different European countries.

It was clear that **EU programmes offer important support for the development of innovative, experimental activities and to facilitate mutual learning across borders**. The funding from these programmes can 'add value' by supporting activities which otherwise would not have taken place and can help to promote a commitment at national level to sustain the activity after the projects end. Participants in the conference therefore pressed for a **major increase in the funding for the relevant programmes** in the period ahead.

The **opportunity to exchange experiences and develop links with peers from across Europe** was recognised as beneficial. Delegates at the conference shared common experiences and through further opportunities for mutual learning, it might be possible to create a common understanding and respect for each other's aims, motivations, approaches and needs. **NGOs have a vital role to play** in prison matters and should be more systematically involved at both project and network level, as well as by the European Commission itself.

Many recommendations were made on how to improve the **dissemination and sustainability** of project results, and key organisations were identified in many European countries which could play a useful role in this regard. Through better dissemination, the opportunities offered by European funding could be maximised in the longer-term.

Participants put forward many suggestions for **future conferences**, and almost 40 organisations expressed a willingness in principle to organise such follow-up events. Topics proposed include:

- Guidance/counseling and validation of prior learning
- E-learning
- Basic skills
- Training teachers
- Research on prison education & training
- Integrated post release education/training
- Release-transition-reintegration
- Art and culture / literature
- Intensifying cooperation between organisations working mainly on offender education and those with a broader offender remit, including potential for exchange of practice and linked research
- Improving the attitudes of the community at large towards ex-offenders and offenders serving community sentences
- Integration of the prisons and prisoners in the local community
- Enhancing the cooperation between the European Social Fund and the Lifelong Learning Programme.
- Sport
- Gender equality strategies in the prison system and specific actions for male and female prisoners.

Finally, in addition to its main aims, the Budapest conference has given participants **new ideas for projects** and provided **new contacts for carrying out future partnerships**, projects and networks together. **European Union funding is clearly instrumental** in this regard. Grundtvig and Leonardo within the **Lifelong Learning programme** (including their related "Accompanying measures"), as well as support for transnational cooperation within the **European Social Fund** in addition to the indispensable long-term support via the national ESF managing authorities, were identified as crucial sources of support for new projects, and it was hoped that new perspectives would be opened up by the recently adopted **Stockholm Programme** in the field of Justice, Freedom and Security.

It was seen as highly significant that the three key Directorates-General (Education & Culture, Employment, Social Affairs & Equal Opportunities, and Justice, Freedom & Security) within the European Commission had collaborated closely to deliver the conference and it was recommended that this new **dialogue and shared approach between the Commission's services** should be continued and further strengthened in the future.

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